A brief Life–Sketch of

Bhagwan Sri Ramakrishna

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॥ ॐ नमो भगवते श्रीरामकृष्णाय ॥

॥ श्रीरामकृष्ण आरात्रिकम् ॥

(मिश्र—चौताल)

खंडन-भव-बंधन जगवंदन वंदि तोमाय।
निरंजन नररुपधर निर्गुण गुणमय ॥
मोचन-अघदूषण जगभूषण चिद्घन काय।
ज्ञानांजन-विमल-नयन विक्षणे मोह जाय ॥
भास्वर भावसागर चिर-उन्मद प्रेय-पाथार।
भक्तार्जन-युगल-चरण तारण भवपार ॥
जृंभित-युग-ईश्वर जगदीश्वर योग-सहाय।
निरोधन समाहित-मन निरखि तव कृपाय ॥
भंजन-दुःख-गंजन करुणाघन कर्म-कठोर।
प्राणार्पण-जगत-तारण कृंतन-कलि-डोर ॥
वंचन-काम-कांचन अतिनिंदित-इंद्रिय-राग।
त्यागीश्वर हे नरवर देह पदे अनुराग ॥
निर्भय गत-संशय दृढनिश्चय-मानसवान्।
निष्कारण-भकत-शरण त्यजि जातिकुलमान ॥
संपद तव श्रीपद भव-गोष्पद-वारि यथाय।
प्रेमार्पण समदरशन जगजन-दुखःयाय ॥

'नमो नमो प्रभु वाक्य-मनातीत
मनोवचनैकाधार,
ज्योतिर ज्योति उजल हृदिकंदर
तुमि तमभजनहार। प्रभु ॥
धे धे धे लंग रंग भंग, वाजे अंग संग मृदंग,
गाइछे छंद भकत-वृंद, आरति तोमार ॥

जय जय आरति तोमार।
हर हर आरति तोमार॥
शिव शिव आरति तोमार।
खंडन-भव-बंधन, जग-वंदन वंदि तोमाय॥
॥ जय श्रीगुरुमहाराजकी जय॥

रामकृष्ण – ध्यानम्

हृदय कमलमध्ये राजितं निर्व्विकल्पं
सदसदखिलभेदातीतमेकस्वरूपम्।
प्रकृति विकृतिशुन्यं नित्यमानन्दमूर्तिं
विमलपरमहंसं रामकृष्णं भजामः। १॥

वितरितुमवतीर्णं ज्ञानभक्ति प्रशान्तीः
प्रणयगलितचित्तं जीवदुःखासहिष्णुम्।
धृतसहजसमाधिं चिन्मयं कोमलाङ्गं।
विमलपरमहंस रामकृष्णं भजामः।

गुरु—शरणागति

नरदेव देव जय नरदेव
शक्ति समुद्र समुत्थ तरंगं।
दर्शित प्रेम-विजृम्भित रंगं॥
संशय राक्षस नाशनहास्त्रं।
यामि गुरू शरण भव-वैदयम्॥
नरदेव देव जय नरदेव
अद्वय तत्व समाहित चित्तं।
प्रोज्ज्वल भक्ति पटावृत वृत्तं॥
कर्म कलेवरम् अद्भुत चेष्टं
यामि गुरुं शरणं भववैदयम॥
नरदेव देव जय नरदेव

Bhagwan Sri Ramakrishna.

THE East has been rightly called the spiritual lighthouse of mankind. Right from the dawn of civilization, there have been numerous occasions when mankind losing its moorings was overwhelmed by the waves of materialism, when it nearly lost its ideal and forgot entirely the aim and purpose of life. It was then and at the right moment when "virtue subsided and vice prevailed that He manifested Himself in the East to help mankind" and saved it from being drowned in the dark sea of materialism. The vast religious lore of India particularly, is full of accounts of these Avataras. Rama, Krishna, Buddha, Chaitanya Mahaprabhu blessed this earth with their presence at the time when humanity had nearly succumbed to the wiles and gloss of the ephemeral, materialistic objects, when it seemed that untruth was about to prevail over truth.

For a thousand years past the world was heading rapidly towards spiritual destruction. The West had been overwhelmed by the materialistic wave; the East had fallen into a deep spiritual inertia. Forgotten was the real purpose of human life; deadened was the fervour for the spiritual glory of the past. Right from the beginning of the 17th century the West had male deep encroachments on the political life of the East. The Europeans had succeeded in spreading their tentacles to every branch of Eastern life. The Industrial Revolution in England in the 18th

century had transformed the mode of life and of social order in the West. The marvellous inventions in diverse branches of physics and chemistry; astronomy and mathematics, had so changed the outlook of the materialistic Westerners that many of their thinkers then seriously believed that the time was fast approaching when man would gain complete mastery over Nature. The machine age resulted in the stampede among the Europeans for the acquisition of new markets and new territories.

This wave of materialism began to pour into India when Western conquerors, sword in hand, came to demonstrate to the children of the sages that they were mere barbarians, a race of dreamers, that their religion was but mythology, and God and soul and everything they had been talking about and often struggling for, were mere words without meaning. Influenced by Western educationists, dazzled by the invention of the steam engine and the electric motor—the railway, the telegraph and the rest — the youth of this ancient land began seriously to think whether, after all, their forefathers were on the right line; whether, after all, their philosophy, their teachings of Karma and renunciation, their insistence on the realisation of God were not mere superstitious idolatory? Doubts arose in their minds and in the absence of a real teacher the test of truth became, "What does the West say?" Out of the feeling of unrest thus produced, there arose a wave of so-called reform in India—a sure sign of inferiority complex.

It required no angel, therefore, to visualise

the engulfment in the near future of the entire East by this wave of materialism. For China it was becoming increasingly difficult to maintain its policy of isolation. Japan, then living a life of seclusion, was the first to fall a victim to the allurements of the Western civilisation. In the middle of the 19th century she revolutionized her political and social institutions, adopted with ardour the material "scientific" civilisation of the West, made herself in these respects a European state, and entered, as a result, upon an international career which, after her remarkable initial successes, induced other Asiatic countries to follow her example.

The righteous, the truly learned, the great souls watched with horror the spread of the dark shadow over the East. The world was on the brink of an abyss. Only an Avatar could save it.

Suddenly and from a strange quarter burst forth a deep, resonant voice crying halt to this mad pursuit after matter; the ephemeral and transient worldly objects. It was from America—the home of the worshippers of Mammon—that a young Indian Sanyasin proclaimed to all the quarters of the Globe:—

> "Ye are the children of God, the sharers of immortal bliss, holy and perfect beings. You are souls immortal, spirits free; blest and eternal; ye are not bodies; ye are not matter; matter is your servant, not you the servant of matter".

The effect was electric; the world was taken by storm. The man in the street was

deeply moved, the philosopher thirsted for a more elaborate exposition. Swami Vivekanand, the young Sanyasin, acquired world-wide fame overnight. During his hurricane tour from one end of America to another he gave the Westerners a foretaste of what the mission of the East was. No longer was India the land of half civilized, naked people; no longer could the West refuse to acknowledge the superiority of the Indian religious thought and philosophy. Humanity had got the message; It was saved.

But who was this Swami? Wherefrom did he arise? Where had he studied; who was his teacher? He was certainly a dynamic personality having a magnetic attraction, and radiating vibrations which at once calmed and uplifted the audiance. He was angelic, he was the embodiment of love, his words had nectar-like effect on the confused and agitated minds of those who came in contact with him. He was great, could there be possibly any greater soul among his people?

The answer came quick and clear. It was not he to whom the credit of awakening the world could go. "If", said he, "there has even been a word of truth, a word of spirituality that I have spoken anywhere in the world, I owe it to my Master; only the mistakes are mine". He was simply a tool in His hands, a particle of that vast all-embracing store-house of love, peace and bliss, the World Teacher—Bhagwan Sri Ramakrishna.

On the 18th of February 1836, when Kamar-

pukur, a small village situated in the Hooghly District of Bengal, was awakening to a new life on the advent of spring, an auspicious boy was born there in a poor but pious Brahman family. The Holi festival was on and the small huts of the villagers, freshly white-washed and decorated looked beautiful. This spring, however, seemed to these simple folk more joyful, more charming and more hopeful. Little did they then realise that Kamarpukur was to acquire undying fame as a result of the birth of this baby who, with infinite love in one hand and infinite knowledge in the other, had come to deliver his message of hope to suffering humanity.

For some months past both the father and the mother had been having strange visions indicating that a divine being would bless their home. Sometimes the mother felt the presence of celestial beings; at other times she would awaken from sleep to hear the tinkling of bells from a child's ankle. The father had seen a dream while performing Shradas at Gaya, in which Lord Vishnu had addressed him thus: "I am born again and again to chastise the wicked and protect the virtuous. This time I shall be born in your cottage and accept you as My father".

Khudiram, the blessed father, was then in his 60th year. He belonged to a highly orthodox family of Brahmans of the priest class. He never accepted gifts from the Sudras. He spent much of his time in worship, meditation and telling of beads. Every day while engaged in prayer, as he invoked the goddess Gayatri, his chest swelled and became radiant with a divine glow

and tears rolled down his cheek. He was more than blessed in his life-partner, Shrimati Chandramani, or Chandra as she was called by the family. She was the very embodiment of rectitude and sincerity. She did not know much about the ways of the world, and being innocent of the art of concealment would say what was in her mind. People loved her greatly for her open heartedness.

Khudiram, an adept in astrology himself, found that the infant was born at a most auspicious moment, giving promise of a brilliant future. This confirmed his interpretation of the vision at Gaya. In honour of the same he named the boy Gadadhar.

There was a gulf of difference between the childish pranks of Gadadhar and other boys. When detected in some mischief he would not try to explain himself by false statements but would confess freely. He was an extremely courageous boy and would never give in to fear or force.

Gadadhar was sent to school early. The income from priestly occupation was not such as could keep the family in affluent circumstances. Khudiram had another son, Ramkumar, elder to Gadadhar who augmented the family income by following the profession of his ancestors. Both his father and brother were looking forward to the day when Gadadhar would acquire sufficient knowledge to enable him to earn his living.

But apart from learning to read and write he did not pay much attention to the kind of studies for which he was sent to school. He

devoted all his energy to the study of the lives and teachings of spiritual heroes. From his early boyhood he was given to meditation and as he grew older he would get frequent trances.

The chief characteristic of the boy was his influence over everyone coming in contact with him. The boys with whom he played could not bear to be separated from him and the villagers who had once seen him would come again and again to Khudiram's house with fruits and sweets and would listen to Gadadhar's talk for hours. This unusual power of attraction he retained throughout his life.

In 1843 when Gadadhar was only seven years of age the family suffered a grave loss through the death of Khudiram. This sad bereavement wrought a great change in the mind of the young boy. He began to take more to his mother's company and would every day recite to her passages from the Ramayana and the Mahabharata. His calm demeanour and a serious look, solaced his brother who had at first been overwhelmed with grief.

Two years later Gadadhar was invested with the sacred thread. He was thus enabled to worship his family deity, Rughavira. While at his worship his mind would become so much concentrated that he would often lose all conciousness of the outward objects.

Kamarpukur is situated on the road to Jaganath Puri. In those days when most of the pilgrims travelled on foot or on horseback, Kamarpukur was one of the stages where they would stay for some days and after resting

would continue the journey. Most often there would come a large number of Sadhus and Gadadhar made it a point to visit them and enjoy their company. Once he was so much attracted by a Sadhu that he was about to renounce the world. But his mother admonished him to beware of false prophets who often took to Sadhu's garb, and convinced by her sound arguments he desisted from taking this step.

Gadadhar had grown very fond of dramatic performances. His introduction to stageplay was as sudden as it was interesting. Once on a Shivratri night the villagers had arranged a dramatic performance depicting the life of Lord Shiva. But the boy who had to play the part of Shiva was suddenly taken ill just when the play was about to start. Someone suggested Gadhadar's name for the substitute. And when dressed and made up as Shiva he was offered worship on the stage he at once went into a trance and the audiance was so struck with his pose and radiance of divine vibrations that they sincerely believed that Shiva Himself had come to give them His darshan. Gadadhar later on organised a small dramatic party from among his companions at school and would spend considerable time in a mangoe grove nearby, rehearsing the performances. His favourite themes were from the Ramayana and the Mahabharata. For himself he selected the part of the hero and the height of the dramatic effect was reached when he sang pastoral songs depicting the exploits of Sri Krishna or the pangs of Sri Radha at her separation from her beloved.

But this sort of life could not continue for long. Ramkumar soon lost his wife and his income also dwindled. Thrown into debt he decided to go to Calcutta where he thought he would be able to earn sufficient money from the practice of priestcraft and of a religious teacher to enable him to pay off his debts as also to maintain his family. Gadadhar was left at home. But his meditations, his worship of the family deity and his trances continued unabated. By his affable nature he influenced the villagers and often joined the kirtans held every evening in the chief temple.

But his aversion to the bread-winning education was becoming daily more pronounced. When Ramkumar admonished him about it, his reply was: "I would rather acquire that wisdom which will illumine my heart and getting which one is satisfied for ever". Thinking that he would be more attentive to his studies at Calcutta under his supervision, Ramkumar took him to the city. In vain did he argue with him on the advantages of modern education; in vain did he attempt to make him realize the fearful consequences of his neglect of these studies.

Meanwhile Ramkumar was finding it increasingly difficult to maintain his family. He ran into more debts. An ardent believer in God's dis-dispensation he surrendered himself to Raghuvira. When his financial difficulties had reached their climax, a new event came about which while giving him fresh courage had a far-reaching and profound effect on Gadadhar's life.

It happend like this. While Ramkumar was deep in one of his pensive moods, a letter came to him asking him, since he was a learned Brahman, to give his opinion on a strange problem. A rich widow of Calcutta, Rani Rashmani, had built a grand temple on the bank of the Ganges at Dakhneshwar. During the eight years of its construction she had spared neither money nor labour to make it a fit and a worthy abode for her Ishtadevi—Kali—who had promised her in a dream that She would manifest Herself in the image set up there. On the eve of the consecration of the temple in 1855 a strange and unforeseen obstacle arose which seemed to destroy her hopes and her plans. Since she was of the *sudra* caste no orthodox Brahman was willing to come forward to preside at the consecration ceremony. Intense was her grief at this hitch but, undaunted, she called for the suggestions and opinions of the learned Pandits of Bengal. The result however was not concouraging for with one voice they upheld the views expressed by the local Brahmans. The Rani was in a fix, for her life's ambition to see the image installed and dedicated at the hands of an orthodox Brahman was coming to a naught. Imagine her joy and relief when Ramkumar declared that the best way out ef the impasse was to make a gift of the temple to a Brahman when no priest could have any objection to conduct the ceremony. At once the formalities were gone through and since it was difficult to find a more pious or a more learned Brahman, the Rani requested Ramkumar to officiate at the ceremony

and to take charge of the temple as its chief priest. Ramkumar in his financial difficulties found the offer too tempting to be rejected and soon he with his brother, Gadadhar, moved to Dakhneshwar to take his residence permanently there.

Sri Ramakrishna—to call Gadadhar by his more familiar name—attracted the attention of the Rani and her son-in-law, Mathur, by his simplicity, devotion and complete aversion to all worldly objects. At the death of Ramkumar a year later it was but natural that they requested him to conduct the worship of the Kali temple. His mode of worship, however was different from that of an ordinary Brahman. He looked upon the image as Mother Herself and treated it as such. While at worship he was totally unconscious of the presence of those around him. All the *mantras* and hymns acquired a real and sanctified meaning when uttered by him. By his conduct of the service the atmosphere in the temple was surcharged with vibrations of love, devotion and faith. By and by Sri Ramakrishna became so much absorbed in the love of the Mother that he lost all interest in other objects of the world. He would often meditate for days in a small grove of trees nearby, forgetting even to eat or drink. During this period of intense *tapasya* he was fondly looked after by his nephew and devotee, Hriday, who used to keep watch on him from a distance and would sometimes put a morsel or two of food in his mouth.

Thus the realisation of God—the vision of the Divine Mother—became the one passion of

Sri Ramakrishna. With tears rolling from his eyes, and singing devotional songs he would come and go out of the temple. Sometimes he behaved like a demented person; at others like an innocent child sore at heart at his separation from his mother. "O Mother! Where art Thou? Reveal Thyself to me. I only desire to see Thee Mother!" —such where the pathetic terms with which he would call Her. His plaintive moans would attract crowds of people, who whispered to one another: "Poor young man. Has he really lost his mother?"

With profound faith and intense conviction that God alone is the source of bliss, Sri Ramakrishna continued the search after the Mother. He took less food and slept very little. He vowed he would not touch money thenceforth. His chest and face were flushed from excessive emotion, the eyes often bathed in tears. At last, however, he thought he could bear the separation from his Mother no longer. "I was then suffering from excruciating pain because I had not been blessed with a vision of the Mother. I could not bear the separation any longer. Life did not seem worth living. Suddenly my eyes fell on the sword that was kept in the Mother's temple. Determined to put an end to my life, I jumped up like a mad man and seized it, when suddenly the Blessed Mother revealed Herself to me and I fell unconscious on the floor".

From this time on Sri Ramakrishna was a changed man. True, he had experienced the Supreme Bliss, but it was only momentary. Nothing short of a continuous vision of the Mother could satisfy him now. Sometimes his desire would

become so intense that he would roll on the ground crying, "Mother, be gracious unto me and reveal Thyself once more". He had just stepped into the realms which were vast and limitless. Every day he had extraordinary visions, some of them while in the trance state, others in normal consciousness. He was often observed talking to the Kali's image as if it were fully conscious. To the ordinary people all this seemed like madness. In this God-intoxicated stage Sri Ramakrishna behaved like a child before the Mother, losing all fear of Her and even conducting himself as a naughty or sometimes as a sullen boy. As his realisation deepened the vision of the Mother became continuous. Formerly he regarded the stone image of Kali as possessed of consciousness; now the image disappeared and in its stead stood the Living Mother Herself. "I actually felt Her breath on my hand", the Master used to say later on.

Having been blessed by the Divine Mother, Sri Ramakrishna began to practise various Sadhnas prescribed by the Shastras for the attainment of communion with the Highest. All this he did in order to impress forcibly on the mind of the people that these ways individually and collectively led to the same goal, and that man need not fritter away his energies by engaging himin conflicts and and differences with the followers of the one or the other.

While going through the various Sadhnas, Sri Ramakrishna acted and lived exactly upto the ideal prescribed therein. In each Sadhna he attained the goal in the shortest possible time and when we bear in mind that it takes

an ordinary *sadhak* many lives to achieve the same, we can at once realize that Sri Ramakrishna was no less than the incarnation of the Highest come on this earth to fulfil the Divine Mission.

He began these Sadhnas with that of the Dasya or of the servant. In this the *sadhak* considers God to be his master and in order to please Him he performs loyal service to Him, giving up all considerations of personal comfort for His sake. The most perfect example of this form of Sadhna is that of Hanuman. Sri Ramakrishna keeping therefore Hunuman as his ideal, acted and lived like him while going through the Dasya Sadhna. Says he: "By constant meditation on the glorious character of Hanuman I totally forgot my own identity. My daily life and style of food came to resemble those of Hanuman. I did not feign them, they came naturally to me. I passed most of the time on trees, calling out in a solemn voice, 'Raghuvir'. In short everything about me was more like a monkey than a human being".

At the end of this Sadhna he had a wonderful vision. While seated underneath a tree, Mother Sita in all her sublime beauty and countenance, expressive of sorrow, compassion and fortitude appeared before him. "In an excess of emotion I was about to fall at her feet crying 'Mother' when she entered my body, I fell unconscious on the ground overpowered with emotion."

After attaining the goal through this Sadhna Sri Ramakrishna spent four years in a state of "divine madness" when he could not bear association with wordly men. Concerned at his failing

health and in order to wean him from his absorption in the other-worldliness his relatives and firends tried all methods of ensnarement, but Sri Ramakrishna's mastery over his passions put them to shame and he was left to pursue his path undisturbed.

It was then that he received a call from his mother, Chandra Devi, She was lonely, she was sad, she was suffering. Sri Ramakrishna, a loving and obedient son as he was could not ignore her importunities to pay her a visit at Kumarpukur where she hoped the homely atmosphere and her fond nursing would bring him round. On reaching his home, the anxious mother found him, restless and indifferent to the affairs of the world. Many remedies were tried—medicinal, exorcisal—but all failed to "cure" his malady. He continued his *tapasya* in the quiet and solitude of the local cremation ground. After sometime, however, he recovered his normal state due, no doubt, to the achievement of his goal. It was then that Chandra Devi thought that marriage would make him take an interest in domestic affairs. But try as she would, she failed to find a suitable match. At last Sri Ramakrishna himself came to her rescue and advised her to go to a certain Brahman's house in the nearby village of Jayrambati where she would find the girl who was to be his consort. She did as directed and he was married to the girl destined to play a remarkable part in his life. After staying for a year and a half at Kumarpukur he returned to Dakhneshwar to continue his work.

Back at the feet of the Mother, Sri Ramakrishna

again continued his various Sadhnas. He used to get trances and his passion for the attainment of the Brahman deepened. During this period he banished from his mind all sense of wealth, passion and sex. To attain this state of complete renunciation he even dressed, talked and behaved like a woman. Once he took to cleaning latrines like a low-caste sweeper in order to eliminate from his mind the idea of caste. An English boy was once seated cross-legged under a tree. Sri Ramakrishna went round him and in his ecstasy worshipped him as Krishna. How forcefully he taught that before a *sadhak* there can be no distinction of religion or nationality.

So days, weeks, months passed in continuous struggle of the soul to arrive at truth. Veil after veil was, as it were, being taken off. Mother Herself became the teacher, and initiated him into the truths he sought. At this time there came to Dakhneshwar a woman Sanyasni, of beautiful appearance, learned beyond compare — Brahmani Bhariavi as she was called. At once she recognised what his trouble was and she said to him: "My son, blessed is the man upon whom such madness comes. The whole universe is mad; all mankind is mad. They are mad for gold, or husbands or wives, for little trifles, mad to tyrannise over somebody, mad to become rich, mad for every foolish thing except God. And they can understand *their* madness only. That is why they call you mad, but yours is the right kind of madness."

With the arrival of Brahmani Bhairavi at Dakhneshwar Sri Ramakrishna began a deep study of various Tantric and Vaishnva scriptures

under her. He accepted her as one of his *gurus* demonstrating thereby that there is nothing innate in a woman that obstructs a man's spiritual progress. If one loves woman for her physical charms only, she is a cause of his degradation; but if one looks to the divinity of her nature and sees in her the Universal Mother, she will help to cut the bonds of matter and show the way to eternal bliss. In the person of Brahmani, Shri Ramakrishna found a living *guru* through whose guidance he arrived ultimately at the same truth which he had realised before by his own unaided efforts.

His previous conquest of the passions and worldly attachments enabled him to go through the fiery ordeals while engaged in the Tantric Sadhnas. In a wonderfully short period the Kundalini was roused in him and made to ascend the different stages until at last she reached his brain.

The period of Sri Ramakrishna's Vatsalya and Madhura Sadhnas is perhaps the most touching in his life. In about 1864 there appeared at Dakhneshwar a Vaishnava Sanyasin known as Jatadhari. He was a devotee of Sri Rama and always carried with him a small image of the god, treating it in all his actions as a real, a living representation of him. Sri Ramakrishna was greatly moved and taking Jatadhari as his *guru* began to practise the Vaishnava form of Vatsalya Sadhna. He would behave like a mother to Sri Rama and by his deep meditation and concentration of thought conducted himself towards the image as if it was the real Rama

in his boyhood. He would feed him, dress him and play with him. Says he of this period: "Ramlala would fix his beautiful eyes on me and smile like a naughty boy he would go on with his pranks, or pout his lips or make faces at me". Thus deep in divine love, Sri Ramakrishna soon attained the goal through this Sadhna.

Then followed the highest form of Vaishnava Sadhna, the Madhura Bhava or the relation between a mistress and her lover. The milk-maids of Brindaban were mad for Sri Krishna; they sought no personal ends; they did not care for their own happiness, their one object was to please Sri Krishna — the embodiment of beauty in all its phases — to whom they had surrendered their body, mind and soul. With a strong desire for practising this Sadhna, Sri Ramakrishna obtained from Mathur a complete outfit of woman's clothing. Dressed as a Gopi of Brindaban, he became mad with the love of Krishna. His every utterance and movement bespoke of the intensity of his feelings, his grief at the separation from Krishna and his desire to meet his Beloved. He spent six months in this state, at no time lapsing from the part he had assumed. The eager expectation gradually turned into mad frenzy. At last he was blessed with a vision. Radha herself appeared before him and vanished into his body. Later on he was blessed with a vision of Sri Krishna Himself. Long after, picking up a blue flower and showing it to his disciples, he said: "Such was Sri Krishna's complexion as he appeared before me during that practice."

But still the Master did not rest. On and on to higher and still higher stages of spiritual realisations he aspired to reach. At this time there came to Dakhneshwar a wonderful man. Totapuri, a Sanyasin who having realised the Brahman as the only Reality looked upon the world as a phantom and spent his life under the canopy of heaven, alike in storm and sunshine. Having achieved the Nirvikalpa Samadhi after forty years of severe and disciplined *tapasya* he wandered from one end of India to the other, never staying at one place for more than three days. Returning from a pilgrimage from Puri and Gangasagar he halted at Dakhneshwar where, in obedience to the Divine Will, he was destined to fulfil a great mission.

Sri Ramakrisha was seated before the Kali temple deep in his meditation, his face brightened with the inner spiritual glow. Totapuri passed that way; something attracted him; he halted and fixing his gaze on the youngman waited until Sri Ramakrishna opened his eyes. Coming nearer he said: "You seem to be an advanced seeker after truth; would you like to learn Vedanta?" "I don't know, I shall ask the Mother", was the simple and innocent reply. "All right", said the monk, "go and ask your mother". Sri Ramakrishna ran up to the Kali's image where, in a state of trance, he was assured by the Mother that it was for the very purpose that Totapuri had been directed to come to Dakhneshwar.

But before giving him lessons in Vedanta, Totapuri initiated Sri Ramakrishna into the sacred order of Sanyasa. All the insignia of a

worldly life—the sacred thread, the hair-tuft on the head—had to be given up. He had to perform the final Shradha of his departed ancestors and of himself too, since after entering Sanyasa he would be practically dead to this world. He went through all these ceremonies and awaited joyfully the day when he would be fully initiated into the order and learn the secrets of Vedanta.

"The day dawned. It was a glorious day for India and indeed for the whole world. The ancient religion of the Vedanta found a new apostle, and the world saw the appearance of a new man filled with the all-embracing love of a Buddha and endowed with the keen intellect of a Shankara. A new Prophet was born who was to be a bridge between the two worlds, the East and the West, and reconcile the faiths of the past with the exigencies of the future".

Totapuri then guided him through the various stages leading to the Nirvikalpa Samadhi. Seated before his *guru* he was directed to give up one attachment after another—the objects of the world, his relatives, his body, all the passions, all the pulls and ensnarements of Maya. With astonishing rapidity and ease he passed through all these, reaching the stage where only his Mother remained. Try as much as he would, he could not give Her up. "It is hopeless", he said, "I cannot raise my mind to the udconditioned state and come face to face with the Atman". Getting into a rage, Totapuri took up a piece of glass lying in the room and pressing its point hard between his eyebrows

said: "Concentrate the mind on this point."

"Then with a stern determination, I again sat to meditate and as soon as the gracious form of the Divine Mother appeared before me, I used my discrimination as a sword and severed it into two. There remained no more obstruction to my mind which at once soared beyond the relative plane, and I lost myself in Samadhi".

For three days and nights Sri Ramakrishna remained in Nirvikalpa Samadhi—in that rapturous ecstasy where the senses and mind stop their functions. Beyond speech, beyond experience and beyond thought, Sri Ramakrishna had reached the Brahman—had become the Brahman.

Totapuri was amazed at this lightening progress of his pupil. A state which it had taken him forty years of hard and persistent labour to attain, was achieved by Sri Ramakrishna in the course of a few days. When slowly and by a solemn manner he brought him to conciousness of the outside universe, he answered the worthy disciple's prostration by locking him in a warm embrace.

A year later, Sri Ramakrishna began a Sadhna which brought a message of hope and comfort to mankind who, forgetting the ideal of a Universal Godhead, had for centuries been engaged in petty and narrow-minded religious and sectarian feuds. Many a page of history has been blackened by the dark deeds of cruelty and torture, by savagery, by wars, carried on in the name of religion. Knowing that the paths prescribed by various religions led to the same goal, Sri Ramakrishna began to try them

himself. He got himself initiated into Islam and rigorously followed the discipline of this religion. Dressed like a Muslim he recited the Nimaz regularly and ate his food prepared in the Mohammadan fashion. After three days he realised the goal of this form of devotion. Similarly at a later date he decided to realise the Divine Mother by a new method, *viz.*, Christianity. He heard discourses from the Bible. His mind was filled with Christian ideas. After a few days he had a vision of Christ who got merged in him. Thus was Sri Ramakrishna convinced that Jesus Christ was an Incarnation of the Lord.

Sri Ramakrishna taught practically that to realise God it is not necessary to belong to this or to that religion; that the religions of the world are not or contradictory or antagonistic; they are but various phases of one Eternal Religion. To emphasise the truth of this basic principle he did not himself found a new religion or sect, but exhorted mankind to follow the noble teachings enunciated in the scriptures of the existitg religions of the world.

Sri Sarada Devi or the Holy Mother as she is known to the world, came to Dakhneshwar in March 1872. Sri Ramakrishna treated her with respect, gave her all the care and thought that an ideal husband should, and educated her in all the duties prescribed for an ideal wife of a householder. Being far above the plane of sense, the divine couple passed more than a year together, their minds attuned to the Infinite.

From even a cursory glance at the life of Bhagwan Sri Ramakrishna it can be found that

the one idea predominant in him was that of Mother—Mother as the supreme God, Mother as the Creative Force, the saviour and the preserver of the universe. He began his Sadhna before the image of Kali — the Blissful Mother— and he rounded it off gloriously with the sacred ceremony called in the Tantras, the Shorasi Puja or the Worship of the Woman. And who was better fitted to play the part of theWoman than his own consort, the devoted and self-less wife, the ideal of womanhood—Sri Sarada Devi herself. In May 1872 Sri Ramakrishna put the Holy Mother on the seat reserved for the Goddess Kali and himself went through the regular form of Her worship. At the end of the sacred *Puja* and uttering the appropriate *mantra* he surrendered himself and the fruits of his life-long Sadhna together with his rosary, at the feet of the Holy Mother and saluted her. This idea of Motherhood as preached and taught by the ideal life of Sri Ramakrishna opens new visions and creates new values. Mother is the emblem of sacrifice and of self-less service, who gives her all for the welfare and happiness of her child without the least expectation of any return. If only we develop this sense of sacrifice in all our relations, between man and man, between nation and nation, all conflicts would vanish and humanity would rise to its pristine glory of peace, harmony and love.

By the end of 1880 Dakhneshwar had become a place of pilgrimage for a large number of devotees and disciples of Sri Ramakrishna. The Master with child-like innocence would feel great pleasure in talking to them on various themes—religious,

philosophical and even mundane. He was a past-master in driving home lessons through parables and sayings. He trained his disciples in the strict forms of discipline, well knowing the grand mission they had to perform in the world. Leaders of religious movements like Keshub Chandra Sen and Vijaykumar Goswami, novelists and politicians like Bankim Chandra Chatterjee and scholars like Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar and the cream of intelligentia of Bengal and India sat at his feet, drinking in deep the truths uttered by him. Thus was started the great movement of rejuvenation and regeneration of the ancient wisdom of the East. His very presence was sending out strong vibrations and rousing the world from its deep spritual stupor. During the last six years of his earthly life, the Master instilled into the minds of his disciples the truths of Vedanta and practical religion, blessing them with his grace. The Holy Mother took care of his bodily needs and selflessly served him. Meanwhile his chief disciple was being trained for the great task which was to be his. Narendra Nath, later known to the world as Swami Vivkananda, came to the Master's presence in 1880 with the simple but sincere question: "Do you believe in God Sir"? The reply was direct and to the point. "Yes". "How?" "Because I see Him just as I see you here, only in a much intenser form". Thus impressed, he was slowly initiated into the secrets of the Eternal Truth until finally in 1886, when the Master was about to cast off his body, he was graced with the Nirvikalpa Samadhi. Prostrating before the Master, the latter said to him: "The Mother has shown you all.

But this realisation of yours shall be locked up for the present and the key will remain with me". How well he discharged the mission of the Master is well-known to the student of modern Indian and world history.

At last after an illness of a year during which time he did not give up his work of enlightening the world, Sri Ramakrishna entered Mahasamadhi at Cossipore on the 16th of August 1886, leaving behind a host of striken devotees and admirers. The dismal news spread quickly and people in their thousands thronged to have the last *darshan* of his divine body. Reverently and solemnly they filed past his earthly remains chanting—

JAYATU RAMAKRISHNA.

॥ श्रीरामकृष्ण-प्रणामः ॥

ॐ स्थापकाय च धर्मस्य सर्वधर्मस्वरूपिणे ।
अवतारवरिष्ठाय रामकृष्णाय ते नमः ॥ ५ ॥
ॐ नमः श्रीभगवते रामकृष्णाय नमोनमः !!!

॥ देवी - स्तोत्रम् ॥

प्रकृतिं परमामभयां वरदां,
नररूपधरां जनतापहरां ।
शरणागतसेवकतोषकरीं,
प्रणमामि परां जननीं जगताम् ॥ १ ॥
गुणहीनसुतानपराधयुतान्,
कृपयाद्य समुद्धर मोहगतान् ।
तरणीं भवसागरपारकरीं,
प्रणमामि परां जननीं जगताम् ॥ २ ॥
विषयं कुसुमं परिहृत्य सदा,
चरणाम्बुरुहामृतशान्तिसुधां ।
पिब भृङ्गमनो भवरोगहरां,
प्रणमामि परां जननीं जगताम् ॥ ३ ॥
कृपां कुरु महादेवि सुतेषु प्रणतेषु च,
चरणाश्रयदानेन कृपामयि नमोऽस्तु ते ॥ ४ ॥
लज्जापटावृते नित्यं सारदे ज्ञानदायिके,
पापेभ्यो नः सदा रक्ष कृपामयि नमोऽतु ते ॥ ५ ॥
रामकृष्णगतप्राणां तन्नामश्रवणप्रियां,
तद्भावरञ्जिताकारां प्रणमामि मुहुर्मुहु: ॥ ६ ॥
पवित्रं चरितं यस्याः पवित्रं जीवनं तथा,
पवित्रतास्वरूपिण्यै तस्यै कुर्मो नमोनमः ॥ ७ ॥

देवीं प्रसन्नां प्रणतार्तिहन्त्रीं,
योगीन्द्रपूज्यां युगधर्मपात्रीं।
तां सारदां भक्तिविज्ञानदात्रीं,
दयास्वरूपां प्रणमामि नित्यं ॥ ८ ॥
स्नेहेन बध्नासि मनोऽस्मदीयं,
दोषानशेषान् सगुणीकरोषि।
अहेतुना नो दयसे सदोषान्,
स्वाङ्के गृहीत्वा यदिदं विचित्रम् ॥ ९ ॥
प्रसीद मातर्विनयेन याचे,
नित्यं भव स्नेहवती सुतेषु।
प्रेमैकविन्दु चिरदग्धचित्ते,
विषिञ्च चित्तं कुरु नः सुशान्तम् ॥ १० ॥

जननीं सारदां देवीं रामकृष्णं जगद्गुरुं,
पादपद्मे तयोः श्रित्वा प्रणाममि मुहुर्मुहुः ॥ ११ ॥

॥ जय श्रीमहामायी की जय ॥
॥ जय श्रीगुरुमहाराजजीकी जय ॥

॥ देवी – प्रणामः ॥

सर्व-मंगल-मांगल्ये शिवे सर्वार्थ-साधिके।
शरण्ये त्र्यंबके गौरि नारायणि नमोऽस्तु ते ॥
सृष्टि-स्थिति-विनाशानां शक्तिभूते सनातनि।
गुणाश्रये गुणमये नारायणि नमोऽस्तु ते ॥
शरणागत-दीनार्त परित्राण-परायणे।
सर्वस्यार्ति-हरे देवि नारायणि नमोऽस्तु ते ॥
जय नारायणि नमोऽस्तुते! जय नारायणि नमोऽस्तु ते!!
जय नारायणि नमोऽस्तु ते!!!

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